

Claudette Colvin Goes to Work

Author(s): Rita Dove

Source: *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Winter 1998), pp. 648-649

Published by: [Georgia Review](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41401445>

Accessed: 20-12-2015 05:22 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia by and on Behalf of the University of Georgia and the Georgia Review and Georgia Review are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Georgia Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## *Claudette Colvin Goes to Work*

Another Negro woman has been arrested and thrown into jail because she refused to get up out of her seat on the bus and give it to a white person. This is the second time since the Claudette Colbert [sic] case. . . . This must be stopped.

—Boycott flier, 5 December 1955

Menial twilight sweeps the storefronts along Lexington  
as the shadows arrive to take their places  
among the scourge of the earth. Here and there  
a fickle brilliance—lightbulbs coming on  
in each narrow residence, the golden wattage  
of bleak interiors announcing *Anyone home?*  
or *I'm beat, bring me a beer.*

Mostly I say to myself *Still here*. Lay  
my keys on the table, pack the perishables away  
before flipping the switch. I like the sugary  
look of things in bad light—one drop of sweat  
is all it would take to dissolve an armchair pillow  
into brocade residue. Sometimes I wait until  
it's dark enough for my body to disappear;

then I know it's time to start out for work.  
Along the Avenue, the cabs start up, heading  
toward midtown; neon stutters into ecstasy  
as the male integers light up their smokes and let loose  
a stream of brave talk: "Hey Mama" souring quickly to  
"Your Mama" when there's no answer—as if  
the most injury they can do is insult the reason

you're here at all, walking in your whites  
down to the stop so you can make a living.  
*So ugly, so fat, so dumb, so greasy—*  
What do we have to do to make God love us?  
Mama was a maid; my daddy mowed lawns like a boy,  
and I'm the crazy girl off the bus, the one  
who wrote in class she was going to be President.

I take the Number 6 bus to the Lex Ave train  
and then I'm there all night, adjusting the sheets,  
emptying the pans. And I don't curse or spit  
or kick and scratch like they say I did then.  
I help those who can't help themselves,  
I do what needs to be done . . . and I sleep  
whenever sleep comes down on me.